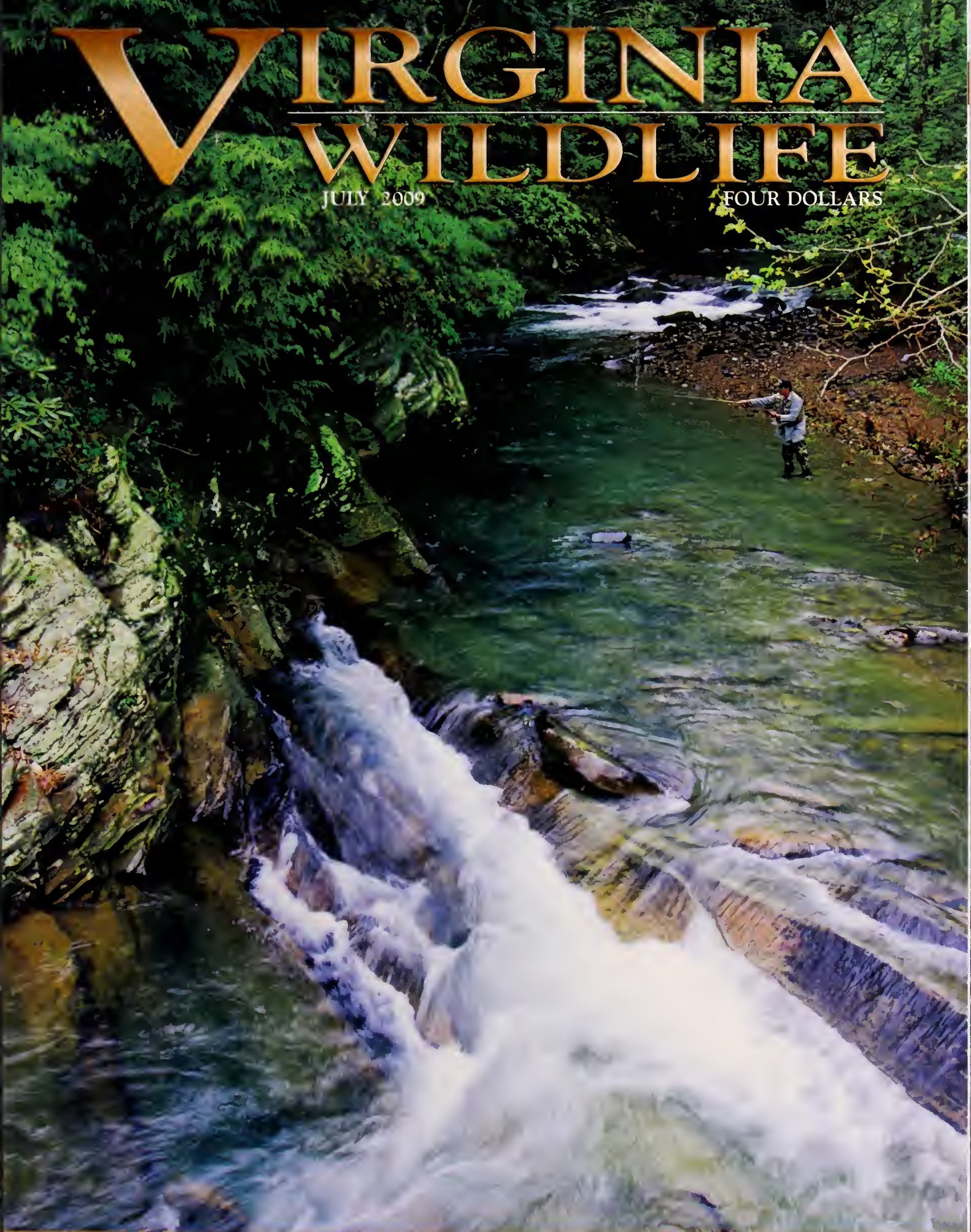


VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

JULY 2009

FOUR DOLLARS



Smallmouth Heaven



Saxis Marsh



Rock Solid Conservation



Commonwealth of Virginia
Timothy M. Kaine, Governor

HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES

Subsidized this publication

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Executive Director



It is with great enthusiasm that I share with you several bits of good news about the future of this agency. During the 2009 legislative session, the General Assembly endorsed a request to move our headquarters to a new location—a move that will save millions of dollars over time. New office space will be built along the I-95 corridor, in the midst of the 'sportsman's triangle' near Green Top, Gander Mountain, and Bass Pro, just south of Ashland in central Hanover County. We believe the convenience of this location will appeal to all of our customers and provide ease of access from the interstate. As part of our relocation, we will streamline operations and reduce square footage—while gaining a sound, healthy building that maximizes energy efficiencies. The move comes after much deliberation, and we appreciate the support of Secretary of Natural Resources L. Preston Bryant, Jr., legislators, longtime customers, and friends.

Looking ahead, managing talent, and engaging in succession planning are integral to sound business practices, of course. Accordingly, I am committed to creating career opportunities for our staff and am thrilled to report that a leadership development program has been put into place. Our first class of 40 employees has begun this journey. Those who answered the

leadership call come from every discipline of our work and every region of the state. These employees are preparing themselves for future leadership roles while continuing their current assignments. They will

be attending board meetings and working closely with division directors over the coming year, building a strong foundation through cross-training and refining their leadership skills. I thank them for their willingness to serve!

Finally, I'd like to formally announce the creation of the "Bureau of Wildlife Resources," which brings under one umbrella the three divisions of wildlife, wildlife diversity, and fisheries. And with grateful appreciation, I'd like to thank David Whitehurst for stepping into his new role as bureau chief. As many of you know, David has served as head of the fisheries division and the wildlife diversity division, and held other key leadership positions during his tenure with the department. This structural change embraces a holistic approach to the management of wildlife resources. It is an approach that maximizes the application of human and capital assets—and the synergies that exist among divisions—to the work at hand.

It is my hope that you will endorse these changes, too, and recognize in them our commitment to a vibrant, healthy future for Virginia's wildlife.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

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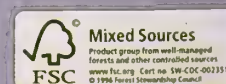
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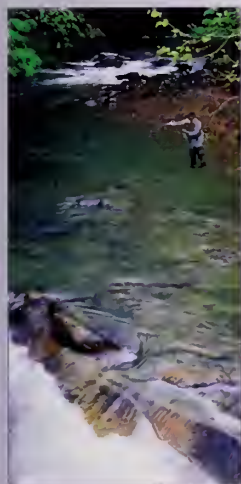
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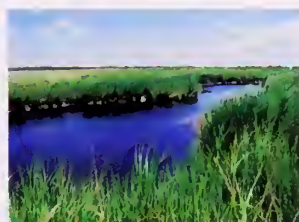
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About the cover: Wolf Creek is one of many trout-stocked waters near the Clinch Mountain WMA and the Channels, a newly designated state forest. Visitors will enjoy an amazing rock formation, wildflowers, and abundant wild-

life. See related story on page 22.

©Dwight Dyke



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Vireos of Virginia

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Fly-fishing the wild and woolly New River

by King Montgomery

By some accounts the New River is the second oldest river on Earth after the Nile, but I can't find definitive evidence to support the contention. The evidence I do have is that the river is pretty wild, has great outdoors opportunities, and hosts one of the best smallmouth fisheries I know. State records caught in the New are: smallmouth bass (8 lb., 1 oz.), muskellunge (45 lb., 8 oz.), yellow perch (2 lb., 7 oz.), and a 3 lb., 10 oz. spotted bass from Claytor Lake.

And DGIF fisheries biologists report the smallmouth bass catching prospects for the New in 2009 are very good.

The New River begins its northward journey just below the Virginia-North Carolina border. Formed by the confluence of the North and South Forks of the New River in Ashe County, NC, it meanders several miles until it crosses into the Old Dominion's Grayson County near Mouth of Wilson. About 160 of the river's 320 miles flow through southwest Virginia.

After entering West Virginia, the New joins up with the Gauley River to form the Kanawha River, a tributary of the Ohio River which, in turn, is a tributary of the Mississippi. The New River's native smallmouth bass populations are thought to have migrated originally from the Ohio River

system and were not stocked, as in other Virginia rivers.

Fishing with a Legend

If fly-fishing throughout the world has a face, it is that of Bernard Victor "Lefty" Kreh, and I'm proud to call him friend, fishing partner, and mentor. Lefty loves to fish for smallmouth bass and trout in the commonwealth, and we've fished together in the South Fork of the Shenandoah and at Mossy Creek. In 2008, we fished the upper New River with guide Mike Smith, professor of English at Bluefield State College, author of *Fishing the New River: An Angler's Guide*, and owner of Greasy Creek Outfitters in Floyd.

Lefty's favorite freshwater fish to catch is the smallmouth bass. After his European service with the Army's field artillery in World War II,

Smallmouth

©King Montgomery



The New River above Claytor Lake offers easy access and the runs, riffles, and rock ledges all hold fish.



Claytor Lake

©Dwight Dyke

Lefty guided for smallmouth on the upper Potomac River near his home in Frederick, Maryland. The famous outdoor writer Joe Brooks, who at one time lived in Richmond, hired Lefty and showed him how to use a fly rod. He then became Lefty's mentor in fly-fishing and in outdoor writing, two areas in which Lefty has excelled for the past 60 years.

A Scenic River

Virginia's part of the New above Claytor Lake is scenic and loaded with smallies, various sunfishes, several catfishes, and stocked walleyes and muskellunge. It is clean water, with no major industrial or urban pollution and little development along its course from the North Carolina border to Claytor Lake. Bounded by farmland in

places, however, the river faces runoff from fertilizers, insecticides, and manure, and its banks are subject to erosion caused by unrestrained cattle.

The upper stretch of the river flows mostly through sparsely populated land, allowing plenty of movement for wildlife. Eagle, osprey, and blue heron are common, and hundreds of other birds visit or live in the watershed. Deer, wild turkey, and black bear call the New River valley home. Waterfowl, in season, including the ubiquitous Canada goose, frequent the New, feasting on plants in adjacent fields and on vegetation in the water. And the smallmouth bass thrive.



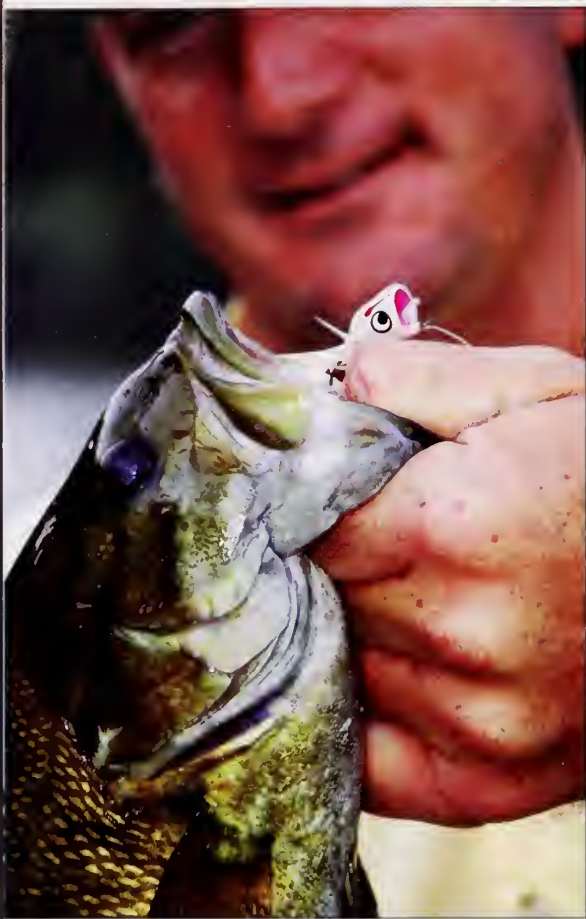
©Dwight Dyke

Heaven

©King Montgomery



Guide Mike Smith, left, and Lefty Kreh admire a young smallmouth bass (also, above) before releasing it.



©King Montgomery

Virginia's part of the New above Claytor Lake is scenic and loaded with smallies, various sunfishes, several catfishes, and stocked walleyes and muskellunge.

Bass Habitat

After our first few days on the New River, Lefty Kreh said if he had to give a class on what prime smallmouth bass living quarters look like, he'd use photos of the New River in his presentation. The New has it all: cool, oxygenated water; varying depths with breaklines and dropoffs; shoreline rocks and tree blowdowns; vegetation; and rock ledges that stitch the river up and down and across. These features add up to superb bass habitat.

The portion of the river above Claytor Lake fishes well from spring through fall for smallmouth bass, and it is a wonderful stream to fish with top-water flies. The bronze-

backs can hang deep under the rock ledges, but the relatively clear water, coupled with the smallie's excellent sight and hearing, allows it to detect top-water poppers and streak several feet to the top to smash them! And this sometimes happens all day long.

Tackle, Tactics, and Techniques

Lefty and I both use Temple Fork Outfitters 9-foot rods, which he helps design, for casting 8- or 9-weight floating lines for most of our bass fishing on the New River. You can use store-bought knotless, tapered leaders, but we like hand-tied 9- to 11-foot monofilament leaders tapered down to a 12- or 15-pound test tippet. (See sidebar on how to tie Lefty leaders.) Flies vary, but white poppers worked best, even at midday, particularly in late summer. Floater-divers, such as the Clouser floating minnow, and the ever-effective Clouser deep minnow in green/white, brown/white, and chartreuse/white also work well. If all else fails, go to a heavy bottom

Lefty Leaders

Let's take an 8-weight and rig it for large- or smallmouth bass, striped bass, bonefish, and many others. The leader should be tied from the same brand and model of monofilament or fluorocarbon (for subsurface flies) such as used on spinning reels. Lefty believes this gives uniformity to the leader in stiffness and other characteristics that enhance its effectiveness. I favor Berkeley Trilene Big Game 50 yard mono leader skeins and Berkeley's Vanish Fluorocarbon also on leader wheels.

For a 9-foot tapered leader, use 4½ feet of 50-lb. test line, then 1 foot each of 40, 30, and 20 lb. test, the last tied with a terminal loop such as a perfection loop or surgeon's loop. Use blood knots or surgeon's knots to connect the main pieces. Then loop on an 18-inch piece of tippet material and you're good to go. Any of these sections can be off by several inches so don't worry about exactness. The fish don't carry tape measures, and casting and turnover won't be adversely affected by a little sloppiness. For longer or shorter leaders, adjust the math accordingly.

©King Montgomery



Well-known outdoor writer C. Boyd Pfeiffer enjoys fishing the New River.



Smallmouth bass fly selection should include floaters, shallow divers, and deeper, bottom offerings. **Below:** Greasy Creek Outfitters owner/guide Mike Smith displays a beautiful smallmouth bass.



bouncing crayfish pattern in green or brown.

I caught a citation 20-inch smallmouth bass while dead-drifting a white popper with some red on it, around noon along a mid-river current seam. The fish fought hard in the fast water, but soon came to net. After a few photos it was released back to its home. □

King Montgomery is a long-time contributor to Virginia Wildlife. He lives in Burke, is a retired Army officer, and has a degree in fisheries biology. He can be contacted at kingangler1@aol.com.

New River Information

- See www.HuntFishVA.com/fishing/ for river information, fishing regulations, and to purchase a fishing license.
- Info on Virginia State Parks is at www.dcr.virginia.gov/state_parks/.
- Greasy Creek Outfitters, www.greasycreekoutfitters.com, 540-250-1340. Mike Smith also guides trout anglers on nearby private waters and books trips to the Bahamas. See www.grandbahamaoutfitters.com.
- *Fishing the New River Valley: An Angler's Guide* by M. W. Smith (2002), University Press of Virginia, www.upress.virginia.edu. Concise instructions of where to go and launch and what to do to catch fish. Lists guides, accommodations, and more.
- *The New River Guide* (2nd ed.) by Bruce Ingram (2008), Ecopress, www.finneyco.com. Covers the entire New River and non-fishing recreation as well. Lists float trips with access points.





©Emily Grey

Black duck
©John Ford

Saxis

by Emily M. Grey

To the untrained eye, Saxis Marsh may look like an endless stretch of 'no man's land'. To the outdoorsman or woman, serpentine guts ribboned with golden acres of spartina, sandy berms, and scattered pine hummocks create a giant playground. Depending on the season, tide, and location one can hunt, fish, and trap or paddle surrounding waters through the evolving Saxis Water Trail Loop.

Nestled in upper Accomack County on Virginia's Eastern Shore, Saxis Wildlife Management Area (Saxis Marsh) remains one of the bay-side's pristine tidal marshlands. Owned and managed by the Department, it is designated part of Delmarva Bayside Marsh IBA, an Audubon important bird area.

One can watch a diversity of wildlife along this coastal portion of the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail, Site CES16. Songbirds, shorebirds, grebes, loons, and birds of prey, such as rough-legged hawks and short-eared owls, join migrating waterfowl here.

"Saxis probably offers the best black duck hunting in the wildlife management area system, as well as good hunting for a variety of other wildfowl species," said Phil West, manager of DGIF public lands. "The salt marshes are a great place for hunters and wildlife watchers to escape civilization and enjoy wildlife in a unique setting."

The property is divided into two peninsular tracts—Freeschool and Michael (or, McKiel) Marsh. It is bordered by the brackish waters of Beasley Bay, Pocomoke Sound, and Messongo Creek and several, smaller freshwater creeks.

With no trails or boardwalks, access is limited and challenging. It is wise to pack insect repellent, boots, and drinking water. Paddlers unfamiliar with the waters may consider hiring an outfitter, as tides and currents can be tricky and perilous.

History

Freeschool Marsh was originally owned by Samuel Sanford. Probated in 1712, his will provided that rents and profits from this land be used to educate poor children in upper Accomack County.

In 1873, proceeds from the sale of this real estate were used to build a little schoolhouse on nearby Saxis village (then called Sykes or Sikes Island). After the public school system was formed, the schoolhouse became part of the Saxis Volunteer Fire Company building.

In 1925, a causeway was built connecting Saxis Island to the marsh.



Marsh

A Place of Uncommon Bounty

More primitive roads linked the mainland to Saxis through the 1800s.

In 1957, the DGIF purchased Freeschool and Michael Marsh with Pittman-Robinson funds. The combined 5,574 acres became known as Saxis Wildlife Management Area. Michael Marsh was last co-owned by the Leaming, Robertson, and Klee-mann families. Public hunting is not allowed on this tract.

Finney Ewell sold Freeschool Marsh to the Department. Public hunting is permitted here on certain days of the season.

"My grandpa caught 1,000 muskrats one day at Lighter Heart Pond in Freeschool Marsh," recalled Danny Marshall, former DGIF game warden and Finney Ewell's grandson. "In winter, their lodges looked like snowballs stacked in the marsh."

For many years this tract, known as Ewells Marsh, was a muskrat ranch. Local people gathered three-



*A muskrat skull reminds passersby of the wildlife present in the marsh system.
Above: Grayson Chesser appreciates the rich history of Saxis Marsh.*



©Rob Simpson

Barn owls are among the many bird species that breed in Saxis Marsh.

Species of Special Concern

"Saxis Marsh provides a large area of high quality habitat for a number of wildlife species throughout the year," said Dr. Gary Costanzo, manager of the DGIF migratory game bird program. "Waterfowl, including the American black duck and shorebirds such as the willet breed, raise their young, and winter there."

"Ducks can find shelter in many tidal creeks and can feed on the seeds of marsh vegetation and abundant invertebrates such as snails and crabs," he continued. "The marsh also serves as a nursery for a number of saltwater fish species and provides habitat for shellfish."

Despite the biodiversity at Saxis WMA, DGIF is observing "species of special concern." These are faunal species classified as federally or state endangered or threatened, or in the Department's special concern status category.

Primary threats to bird populations include loss of habitat due to sea level rise and raccoon and gray and red fox predation. Invasions of common reed

and black needlerush are impeding survival of Henslow's sparrow, once a prevalent nester, and black rails, sedge wrens, and seaside sparrows.

Saxis Marsh is home to Virginia's largest population of saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrows. American oystercatchers, Forster's terns, and barn owls are other significant breeders. Peregrine falcons, chuck-wills widows, bald eagles, prairie warblers, and eastern meadowlarks are other birds of special concern here.

Someday, northeastern beach tiger beetle larvae, which inhabit vertical burrows along the intertidal zone, may be obliterated by rising sea levels.

Northern diamondback terrapins, Virginia northern flying squirrels, and eastern hog-nosed snakes are other non-avian species of immediate conservation need.

Virginia's *Wildlife Action Plan* allows DGIF staff to manage wildlife and habitats across six state eco-regions. Through careful monitoring, hope remains alive for those of special concern. Go to www.bewildvirginia.org. □

"The salt marshes are a great place for hunters and wildlife watchers to escape civilization and enjoy wildlife in a unique setting."

square grass seed for sale to off-shore buyers. Windmills pumped water into ponds during dry spells.

Lifelong resident of the area Granville D. Ross was DGIF's game manager during the 1957 Saxis Marsh purchases. Banding waterfowl, trapping, and keeping boundaries separated were part of his job.

"I was dedicated to the protection of Saxis Marsh," said Ross, also a former U.S. Deputy for the Fish and Wildlife Service and part-time DGIF game warden. "I spent many a night with a box of crackers, a Coca Cola, and a can of beans watching for poachers. Residents' backyards were marshes. Some took what they could while they could."

"I got a kick out of watching Canada geese in the fields," he continued.



©Emily Grey



The guts of a marsh provide needed shelter to a host of waterfowl, fish, and mammal species.

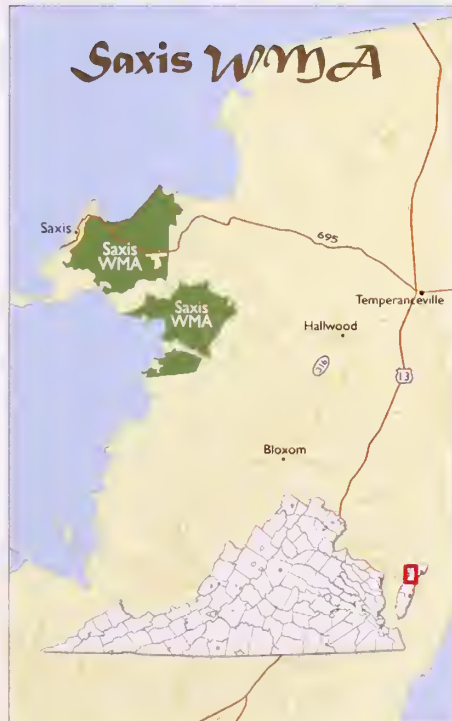
Mud Larking

Last November, former DGIF game warden Grayson Chesser and I cruised by skiff through Jack's Gut and other inlets of Saxis Marsh. This renowned decoy carver operates Holden Creek Gun Club on historical, family property at nearby Jenkins Bridge.

On this unseasonably warm, sunny afternoon, surf scoters, green-winged teal, and black ducks winged over Drum Bay. At Freeschool Marsh, we startled a flock of seaside sparrows and discovered a muskrat skull lying on the beach.

Mink, opossum, cottontail rabbits, river otter, and white-tailed deer also inhabit this terrain. Rockfish, flounder, and a variety of trout, drum, and other fish give sport to anglers in open waters.

A peregrine falcon nesting platform still looms over saltwater bush-



Directions to Saxis Wildlife Management Area:

From U.S. Highway 13 at Temperanceville, take Route 695 west on Saxis Road for approximately 10 miles.



©Emily Grey

Black Duck Study

In Saxis Marsh and other traditional wintering areas, American black duck populations have declined by as much as 60 percent. To pinpoint the causes, Ducks Unlimited and its partners, including DGIF, initiated a multi-year study in several East Coast states.

Capturing and fitting female black ducks with GPS transmitters (shown here) allows researchers to track the birds as they move from wintering to staging to breeding grounds. Landscape analysis using satellite imagery and GIS helps researchers determine whether there is adequate habitat to support black duck wintering populations. Important black duck food samples, such as invertebrates and aquatic vegetation, are also examined.

"We're trying to estimate the availability of foods consumed by black ducks on the Eastern Shore," explained Ben Lewis, graduate candidate Illinois State University working with DU. "Preliminary results show there's much less food available in important black duck habitat."

"With waterfront development, it's especially important to leave marshes and wildlife refuges that can serve as natural buffers and provide habitat," he added.



es. We spotted Michael Marsh to the south and the remains of the Drum Bay Hunt Club hut at Tunnels Island. A mile to the north lies Maryland's coast.

"Every piece of Saxis Marsh is beautiful," Grayson opined. "I don't know how long it will last. It's going away fast. A lot of little tumps and islands have already washed away. There's little marsh left between the causeway and the sound."

Barely three feet above sea level, Saxis Marsh's hummocks are shrines to dead cedars and loblolly pines lost to storms and flooding. Climate change is a minimally addressed, local issue. Like a silent killer, steadily rising sea levels continually diminish the bayside landscape.

The clean, briny air, vast landscape, and stark natural features made the trek worthwhile. A rare glimpse at Nelson's sharp-tailed sparrows in winter, flycatchers in warm seasons, and other sensitive and familiar species are nature's gifts.

We docked at the village of Saxis, human population just over 300. Crabhouses and slips with workboats and pleasure craft decked the shoreline. Saxis, Messongo Creek, and Marsh Market offer free public boat ramps.

"Of all the water towns on the Eastern Shore, Saxis is close to what it was in the beginning," Chesser said.

By the quayside and fishing pier in winter, one may see northern canvasback, common eider, and redhead ducks mingled with mergansers, goldeneye, and resident mallards.

Perhaps the growing focus on Saxis Marsh with its varied outdoor recreation and watchable wildlife may be just the antidote that rejuvenates the tiny fishing hamlet of Saxis. □

Emily M. Grey is a writer, photographer, naturalist, and attorney from Virginia's Eastern Shore. Her passions are nature, traveling, and interacting with varied cultures.

For More Information

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, (804) 829-6580
www.dgif.virginia.gov

©Dwight Dyke



Lee Walker

Quincy Lands at Raptor Center

by Marika Byrd

Quincy became the first bald eagle to enter the Robert M. Freeman Bald Eagle Habitat and Raptor Valley, located at Maymont, in Richmond. The eagle was nursed back to health following partial amputation of one wing at the Wildlife Center in Waynesboro, after being found near death at a landfill in King and Queen County. The bird is named for President John Quincy Adams, whose father, President John Adams, was critical to making the bald eagle our national symbol.

Maymont's Eagle Habitat and Raptor Valley

The natural environment is enclosed with open wire fencing to protect the birds from other prey—both human and animal. Signs along the handicapped-accessible trail provide information about the bald eagle and

other birds like the Cooper's hawk, barred owl, American kestrel, and black vulture.

The new Wachovia Amphitheater seats 60 and provides a venue for ongoing educational programs about Virginia's wildlife and their environment, including birds of prey.

These are 'non-relocatable' birds that need protection to live comfortably with dignity and respect. Maymont does not accept injured animals, as it is not a treatment facility, according to Henry Buz Bireline, director of habitats and nature center at Maymont.

Bireline adds that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department (DGIF) have cooperated with permits required for these animals to become residents—as is the case for any endangered species on the federal or state list.

At the dedication last September, DGIF's David Whitehurst said, "This beautiful new facility is an outstanding tribute to Robert M. Freeman. It's a perfect expression of his affection for the nation's symbol—the bald eagle—and for nature. It is also an outstanding manifestation of Mr. Freeman's desire to share his deep and enduring appreciation for eagles and wildlife with others. His family has chosen a wonderful venue in Maymont to accomplish Mr. Freeman's goal."

Ed Clark, president of the Wildlife Center, added, "Many people have heard the phrase, 'People protect what they love, love what they understand, and understand what they are taught', but nowhere is that more relevant than in wildlife conservation. Creatures that were once killed

on sight as pests and vermin are now revered and protected as a result of a fundamental change in society's attitude toward raptors and other predators, a change brought about through education. This new exhibit will extend and reinforce the public's understanding and love of birds of prey, and will ultimately lead to a greater appreciation of these wonderful creatures."

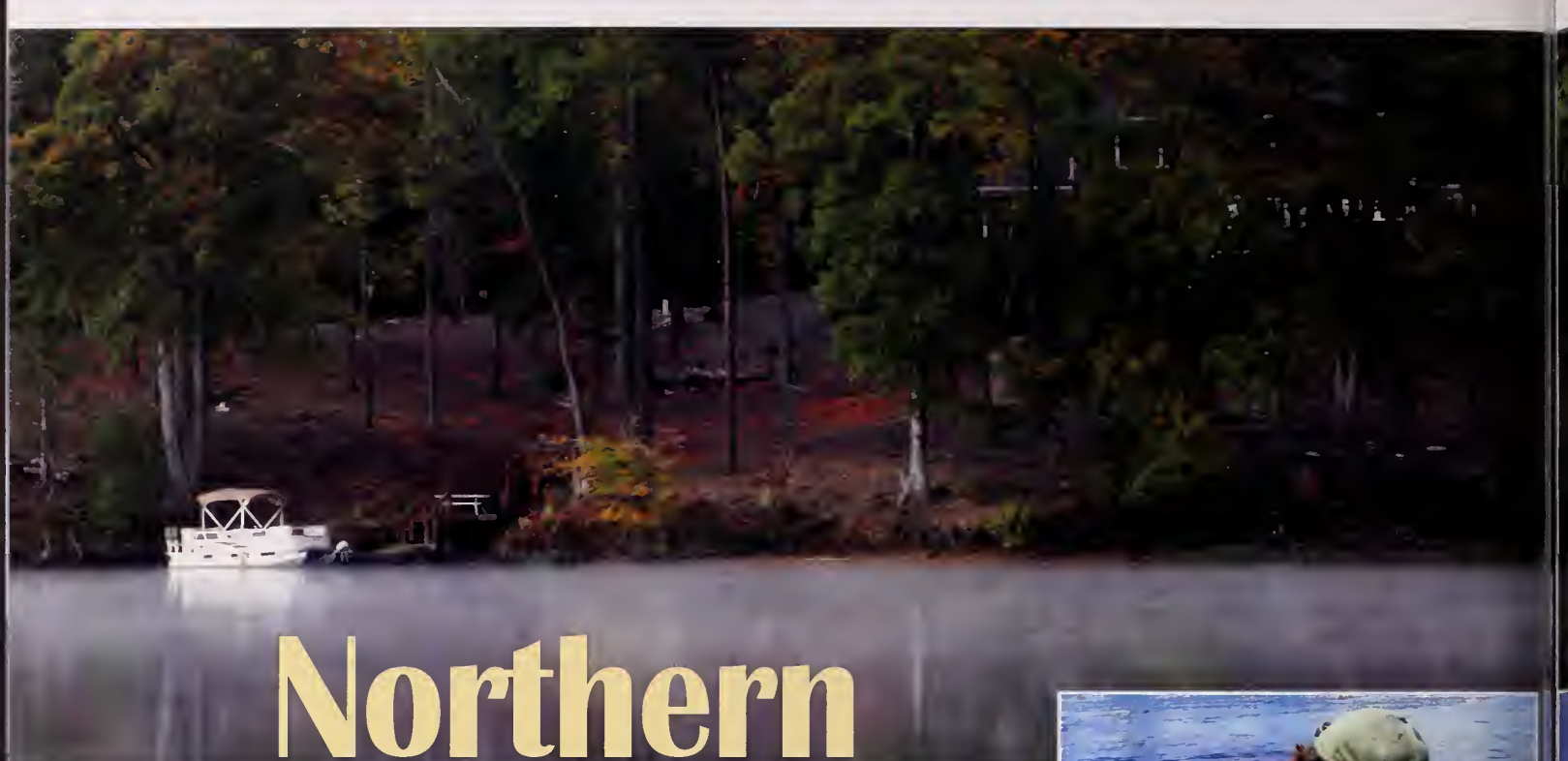
Have you been to the exhibit yet? Try going afield to see all of these birds in one day: It will not happen! You'll want to return to this magnificent facility where animals are managed in perpetuity for our education and enjoyment. Visit: www.maymont.org/NetCommunity. □

Marika Byrd of Glen Allen is a freelance writer/photographer and member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.



Lee Walker

Wildlife Center president Ed Clark prepares to release Quincy into the new raptor center.



Northern Virginia's "Other" Fishery

©Marc McGlade

by Marc N. McGlade

*Northern Virginia's Occoquan Reservoir lies
in the shadow of the Potomac River—
but it shouldn't.*

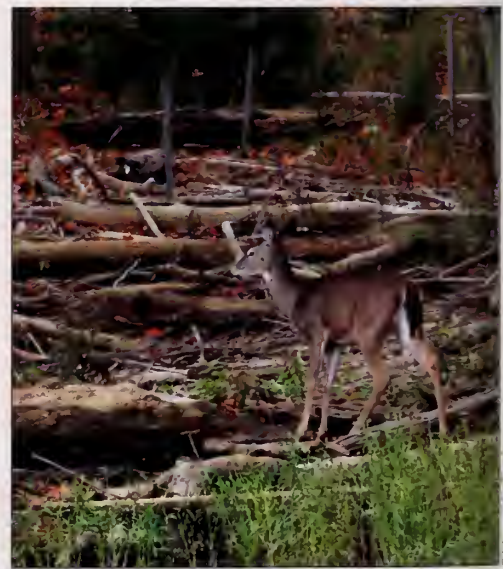
My white spinner bait landed alongside the blowdown on the craggy shoreline with nary a splash. A crank or two of my bait-casting reel's handle set the baitfish imitator in motion. Before I realized what was happening, a vicious strike and street fight ensued.

The bursting colors of towering trees gave reassurance that fall is indeed a beautiful time of year in Virginia. Catching a fish this strong helped reinforce my love of autumn, as well. When it was all said and done, the 37.5-inch northern pike weighed 12.5 pounds, and reigned as Occoquan Reservoir's record for

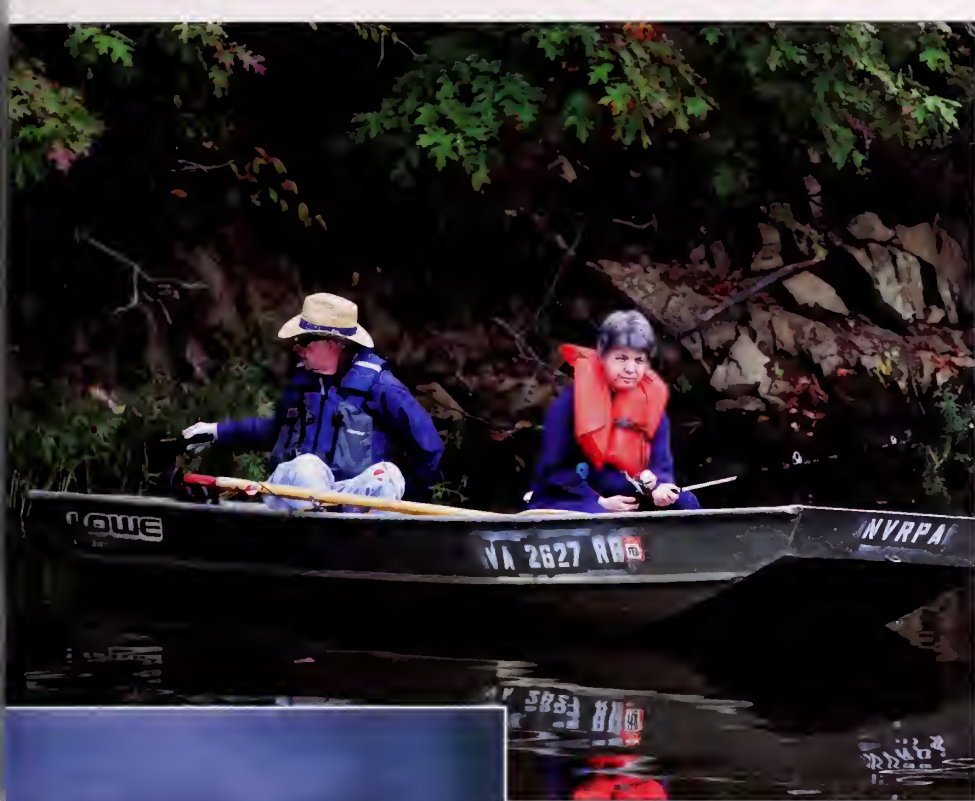
three years. Monroe Parker, the legendary ranger at Fountainhead Regional Park, informed me that it was the de facto lake record until three years later when a 16-pounder usurped my catch.

While this story is not about northern pike, it is about Occoquan Reservoir. Pike are rarely stocked at the reservoir straddling Fairfax and Prince William counties, but other species abound, and this body of water is a don't-miss spot in Northern Virginia for anglers of all types.

Occoquan Reservoir is among the top-producing lakes in the region for largemouth bass and crappies, most



Flathead catfish are plentiful at Occoquan, as are whitetails and other wildlife.



©Marc McGlade

Anglers can rent boats at the reservoir and enjoy beautiful scenery.



©Dwight Dyke

Crappie (shown here) and largemouth bass are favored by anglers.

notably in the spring. Additionally, this reservoir holds the current state record for flathead catfish. A whiskered beast of 66 pounds, 4 ounces reigns supreme as the commonwealth's champion flathead.

Formed by the confluence of Bull Run and Occoquan River, this 2,100-acre reservoir is a steep-sided, deep body of water that can present fishing challenges. When crafty anglers unlock the secret here, it can be a dynamite place to catch trophy-sized fish of a variety of species.

While most anglers in the northern portion of the commonwealth pursue bass on the famed Potomac River, a growing cluster of them con-

centrate their efforts on this scenic reservoir. Officials at the reservoir enforce a 10-horsepower maximum limitation for outboards, which is still a viable choice for larger boats that have efficient trolling motors. There are plenty of productive spots to target close to each of the marinas.

The historic town of Occoquan nestled at the base of the Occoquan Reservoir dam overlooks the Occoquan River. Above the dam is a veritable gold mine for anglers.

Just the Facts

According to John Odenkirk, a fisheries biologist with the Department (DGIF), very few flathead catfish were stocked into Occoquan in the late 1960s.

The flathead catfish (*Pylodictis olivaris*) has nicknames such as yellow cat, mud cat, and shovelhead cat. This large species sports a broad and flat head. Its lower jaw protrudes beyond the upper. Flatheads have a slightly rounded tail and a yellowish or cream-colored background, highlighted with black, dark brown, or olive mottling on their backs and sides.

Flatheads are omnivorous but feed primarily on live fish. They will venture into very shallow waters at times. They are found in large rivers and lakes and prefer deep, slow stretches near strong currents. These solitary specimens use riprap, brush piles, sunken logs, and other debris for cover. Seventy-two to 84-degree water temps represent the optimal spawning time for flatheads.

"For some reason," Odenkirk said, "this population never 'exploded' like many other populations in the Southeast outside its native range. This population has persisted at a relatively low level for many decades." Odenkirk explained that when a small population exists—especially a non-native one—a competitive advantage may occur, allowing those individuals to reach trophy proportions. This, he adds, is a similar situation to Lake Orange's world-record white bass.

"That, coupled with good forage and productivity, probably had the most to do with growing that flathead catfish," he said.

Mike Willems was the angler who caught the trophy on May 6, 1994. Catches of flathead catfish weighing 25 pounds or measuring 40 inches in length qualify for a trophy fish certificate from the DGIF.



©Marc McGlade

Former Fairfax resident Kurt Dove fishes for largemouth bass.



There are plenty of boats available to rent at Fountainhead Regional Park and other nearby facilities.

©Marc McGlade

"The angler (Willems) brought that flathead to Locust Shade Park during a fishing dedication to have it checked (certified)," Odenkirk said. "He carried it down live in an upside down roof-top car carrier, and returned it alive to the reservoir after it was checked and weighed."

Anything Else to Catch?

Other than flatheads, there indeed are more species to conquer at Occoquan.

"This is mostly known as one of the district's best largemouth bass waters," claimed Odenkirk. "It also has great crappie fishing (whites and blacks), and a good channel cat population. It receives surplus northern pike from time to time, but I would not recommend it for that."

Of course, whenever a body of water coughs up a state record, thoughts immediately turn to ques-

tions if another monster could be lurking, regardless of the species.

Odenkirk replied, "Yes, there could, but probably only for flatheads and perhaps crappie or a channel cat."

The main draw here is not flatheads. While occasional giant flatties do show their whiskered faces, the largemouth bass fishery is the real deal.

"When we were keeping tournament records (for largemouth bass), Occoquan Reservoir had the highest catch rate for largemouth tournaments over any other state water," Odenkirk explained. "Even more than Anna, Smith Mountain, Buggs Island, etc. I have heard anglers complain that they only catch 2- to 5-pounders all the time."

While Odenkirk acknowledges there aren't many trophy fish certificates issued for bass (22 inches in



©Marc McGlade

Opportunities abound for pier fishing at Occoquan Reservoir.

length or weighing 8 pounds or more) at Occoquan Reservoir, there are loads of fish in the 2- to 5-pound category.

Worth the Trip

Not to take anything away from the famed Potomac River, but anglers in the northern portion of the commonwealth—or visitors to the region—would be doing themselves a great



Kurt Dove, a professional bass fisherman, hefts a chunky largemouth bass.

©Marc McGlade

disservice by not casting a line in Occoquan Reservoir. Crowds, when compared to other area waters, are significantly less. The fish are cooperative, the scenery is beautiful, and perhaps another state-record flathead is swimming around. Maybe a crappie or channel cat, as well.

I wonder if I head back up there and burn a white spinner bait alongside a blowdown if I could catch another northern pike... □

Marc N. McGlade is a writer and photographer from Midlothian, who in the past frequented Occoquan Reservoir whenever he got the chance when he lived in Northern Virginia.

For More Information

- For fisheries information and regulations regarding Occoquan Reservoir, contact the DGIF Region 5 office in Fredericksburg by phone at (540) 899-4169. For even

more information, visit online at www.HuntFishVA.com.

- Boat launch ramps and rental boat facilities include Fountainhead Regional Park, (703) 250-9124; Lake Ridge Park, (703) 494-5288; and Bull Run Marina. Currently, Bull Run Marina is not staffed, but boaters who desire to launch watercraft at the marina may purchase a season pass and gate key from Fountainhead Regional Park.
- There is a 10-horsepower maximum limitation for outboard engines at Occoquan Reservoir.
- For an updated, quality map, refer to "GMCO's Pro Series Map of Occoquan Reservoir." Contact them by phone at (888) 420-6277 or (540) 286-6908, by e-mail at gmcomaps@comcast.net, or visit their Web site at www.gmcomaps.com.



A walkway and fishing pier provide convenient access to landlubbers.

Up Close with the Nation's Symbol

by Glenda C. Booth

A sliver of mid-March moon and sparkling sky gently illuminate soybean stubble in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge. It's 5:30 a.m., 36 degrees.

Her truck bed loaded with three deer carcasses, Sandy Spencer, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service biologist, joins DGIF coordinator for nongame bird projects Jeff Cooper in the Richmond County field. The land called the Tayloe Tract abuts Cat Point Creek, a tidal tributary of the Rappahannock River. They quietly align the deer near the mid-point of a 30-by-40-foot nylon net furred under a camouflage of loose hay. The goal? To catch a bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*).

Cooper and Spencer then retreat to a dark, weathered shed 100 yards from the net, partly concealed by briars and shrubs, where two volunteers shuffle in the chill. Dawn's avian chorus begins its crescendo.

Everyone peeks through several 2-to 4-inch vertical gaps in the walls. Around 7 a.m., Cooper spots three bald eagles fishing in the creek, nowhere near the bait. The group waits . . . and waits . . . and waits . . . and waits some more. In between chunks of homemade cornbread,



Jeff Cooper, DGIF coordinator for nongame bird projects, displays the catch, a male bald eagle around three years old. **Right:** Cooper extracts the eagle from the net.

someone jokes about the area's reputation as an eagle hotspot. In fact, it had 145 eagles in 2007. The gizzard shad and white perch are running and the birds are probably feeding on fish, speculates Cooper. More waiting.

Several vultures swoop across the sky, investigating aerially. A few eagles soar overhead off and on, circling broadly 300 to 400 feet up, but





Dwight Dyke

It takes five years for a bald eagle to reach full maturity and acquire a white head and white tail.

The eagle takes halting 'baby steps' for what seems like an hour toward the bait. Everyone cranes, stiffly, soundlessly. Under his breath, Cooper says that the eagle is nibbling; a catch could be imminent. He begins a whispered countdown. "Don't fire until I say fire," he instructs Bob Cralle, a first-time volunteer assigned to push the detonator. Slowly, slowly, dragging out the words, Cooper intones, "Three." Pause. "Two." Pause. "One." Long pause. "Fire!" Cralle fires.

A deafening blast cuts across the field and in split seconds, three rockets propel the net up, out, and down over the birds. "We got him," Cooper exults, and he yells at David Whitehurst, who serves as the director of the bureau of wildlife resources for the DGIF and happens to be a long distance runner, to sprint to the captives. The less agile follow.

Cooper throws his coat over the scrunched up eagle. Carefully handling the bird's razor-sharp talons and menacing beak, he deftly extracts the bird from the net, his experience evident. This is one angry bird. Cooper says it's a male. The eagle repeatedly stretches his beak open wide, slashes around his long pink tongue and glares at his captors with fierce, piercing eyes. He's ready for battle. Cooper announces, "He's a small

one." Small or not, he's important.

Cooper and Spencer slip an improvised sock cap over the bird's head to calm him. They examine his plumage and Cooper explains that he is a third-year bird with second-year plumage. They bind his claws with ace bandages.

With the bird's eyes covered and talons bound, they measure the beak, wing and halux (or, thumb). They swaddle the body with an ace bandage and weigh him: eight pounds and four ounces.

Cooper clamps a metal band on each ankle. The first is from the U. S. Geological Survey banding lab, bands that have been used for



USF&WS biologist Sandy Spencer weighs the young eagle.

they drift away. It seems like an avian tease. Finally, around hour four, a bald eagle checks out the bait at 100 feet or so above.

At 10:55, the morning has warmed up and two unsuspecting turkey vultures suddenly land and begin to feed—a good sign! Wary eagles are lured to land if vultures are feeding, says Cooper.

At 11:00, a mottled eagle sails overhead just above the tree tops and suddenly hits the ground 30 yards away from the deer, out of the net's range. Cooper instructs, "Be quiet. Don't move."

decades. Band recovery provides most of what scientists know about birds' movements. 'Our' eagle becomes number 62947696.

Then Cooper puts on a purple band, identifying the eagle as "W" over "C," with purple denoting that the catch was in the Chesapeake Bay area. Each East Coast state uses a different color.

After a picture-taking session, 15 minutes have elapsed. Cooper loosens the binds and sends "W. C." to the skies.

Looking for Answers

Why do biologists go out before sun-up in the cold, crouch in a dark shed, squint through board slits for hours, and scan the sky for eagles? "This will help us better understand their movement among states and among concentration areas in Virginia and Maryland. It will help us locate high priority habitat and protect these areas, which in turn helps ensure the eagles' survival," answers Cooper.

The Chesapeake Bay, a rich fishery, is an area of convergence for migrating bald eagles and has the second largest breeding population on the East Coast. The Rappahannock, James, Potomac, York, Nanticoke, and Pocomoke rivers are home to large concentrations.

The Chesapeake region hosts three distinct populations: resident eagles that move around but primarily stay in the bay area, 'northern' eagles that use the bay in the winter and 'southern' eagles that use the estuary in the summer. "These birds are hardwired to use the bay as an important component of their life cycle," stresses Cooper.

Cooper wants to learn more about communal roosts. "A roost site is more important than a single nest site because it is used by multiple birds, migrants, and immature birds," he emphasizes. Biologists think that eagles may "exchange information" and that the young learn from older birds on the roosts.



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Above: Cooper measures the eagle's wingspan, as Spencer assists. DGIF's David Whitehurst records the data. **Below left:** Cooper measures the talon.

More Information:

Bald eagle facts—www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/birds/bald-eagles.asp.

The Rappahannock River Valley National Wildlife Refuge—www.fws.gov/northeast/rappahannock.

History of recovery—www.fws.gov/midwest/eagle/recovery/biologue.html.

Virginia's Breeding Population and Productivity—ccb.wm.edu/eaglevideo/eagle_background.htm.

Virginia's Protection Guidelines—www.dgif.virginia.gov/wildlife/laws/FederalManagementGuidelines—www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/issues/BaldEagle/NationalBaldEagleManagementGuidelines.pdf.

DGIF Eagle cam: www.dgif.virginia.gov/eaglecam.

If you see a banded eagle—

Report any banded eagle you see (and ideally, the number) to the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, 804-367-1693.



©Glenda Booth



Lee Walker

Releasing a banded eagle safely back to its natural environs is the ultimate goal.

"We don't know where many roosts are, but if we did, it would enable us to assess the quality of the site, the extent of use, and then work with landowners to preserve the site," Spencer says. "Roost sites and forage areas are as important as nests in the bald eagle's life cycle, but because they may not be as obvious to the casual observer, they may inadvertently be impacted by incompatible land uses."

Why does DGIF do this work? "What happens in Virginia, Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay has implications for populations up and down the East Coast. We have a lot of responsibility not only for our breeding population, but for migrant eagles that depend on the bay's concentration areas for part of their life cycle," maintains Cooper.

"We need to know what areas are of highest importance to ensure that high quality habitat is not lost. Tracking and monitoring eagles is the only way to identify where high priority areas are located. That is one of the most important bits of information we could glean if we used transmitters," he emphasizes.

Challenges

Habitat loss is the major threat to bald eagles today, Cooper explained in a later interview. Shoreline habitat is diminishing, especially on the Potomac, James, and Rappahannock rivers. "Once it's developed, it's out of production forever," Cooper lamented.

Eagle expert Brian Watts concurred: "Urban sprawl and shoreline development have replaced DDT as the greatest threat," said Watts, who directs William and Mary College's Center for Conservation Biology. "With more than 75 percent of pairs on private land, the future will rest with private landowners," he added.

Cooper works with hundreds of landowners and usually, they find ways to protect eagles and still use private property. "In most instances, development is not stopped," he said.

Federal wildlife managers like those at the Rappahannock refuge are permanently protecting bald eagle habitat along several Virginia waterways. "Bald eagles are an important focus of our management on three refuges on the James and Rappahannock rivers," said Joe McCauley, Rappahannock refuge manager. "It's the most important function we serve. Just because eagles were removed from the list of federally-threatened species, there's still work to be done. Now that they are completely removed does not mean we can relax. FWS will still maintain it as a focal species," he stressed.

Toxic lead is another worry. Cooper gets several reports a year of lead toxicosis in bald eagles. "Lead poisoning in eagles is surprisingly common," according to Jonathan Sleeman, DGIF's wildlife veterinarian. While sources are unconfirmed, Sleeman suspects eagles come across it in fishing sinkers and lead shot. Steel

and many alternatives are now available to anglers and hunters.

Starting in the winter, DGIF and Virginia Tech will take blood samples, measure lead levels, try to correlate the findings with the food eagles eat, and analyze body growth.

Finally, there's global warming. Cooper speculates that with warmer winters up north and more open water there, fewer eagles may be coming south, but this has not been documented. Warming can also affect the range and distribution of prey species and change salinity levels in rivers.

"Rising temperatures and sea level in the state will likely change the makeup of entire ecosystems, forcing wildlife to shift their ranges or adapt," says the National Wildlife Foundation. Global warming is linked to many birds moving their traditional ranges. The bald eagle's range is moving inland, according to a February National Audubon Society report. "Now they are wintering inland as far north as the ice will let them and they now winter all across the 48 states and southern Canada. We found wintering bald eagles increasing in all 48 contiguous states," reported Greg Butcher, Audubon's director of bird conservation.

Onward

Cooper is in his second year of rocket netting eagles. In 2008, he caught three; in 2009, 11. He has his fingers crossed for satellite telemetry equipment, which costs around \$2,500 per bird, plus \$200 per month or so to track a bird.

Jeff Cooper devotes hours—at all hours—in light or dark, to crawl around farm fields and hide out in old sheds to save bald eagles. What's next? He hopes to catch 40 to 50 bald eagles a year in multiple locations over the next five winters to expand our knowledge of this majestic bird, symbol of the strength of the nation.

"It's just a matter of having the time. It's not too hard to catch them," he chuckled. □

Glenda C. Booth, a freelance writer and legislative consultant, grew up in Southwest Virginia and has lived in Northern Virginia 37 years, where she is active in conservation efforts.

ROCK SOLID CONSERVATION



Old firetower



Carolina saxifrage

Local Community Perseveres to Save the Channels

by D. J. Mathews

When my sons were young, we sometimes ventured up a steep trail, a trail leading to an old firetower and rocky overlooks. You could see the sharp line of the scenic Clinch Mountain chain on this border between Washington and Russell counties in southwest Virginia, close to the Hayter's Gap community. My husband even brought a boy scout troop up there to camp, the night clear enough for a dazzling show of shooting stars.

Recently, I went up that trail again. This time it was with hiking companions Tom Hunter, a longtime birder, and Bill Dingus, southwest steward for the state's Natural Heritage Division. Our trail was ablaze with the tiny white flowers of garlic mustard, an alien species Dingus said was far too pervasive to try to eradicate. Hunter, who'd brought a tiny CD device complete with different bird calls, tried to determine what we heard in the distance. At over 3,000 feet, neotropical birds were migrating through this soon-to-be designated state forest, like the brightly colored red tanager we spied in the barely leafing out

tree canopy overhead. We also found the off-white little eggs of a junco that'd just flown off—her nest in the bank barely covered by some stringy, gray material. But on that particular day, we were on our way to seeing something even more unique: the Channels.

About 30 steps beyond the looming, 50-foot firetower, through rhododendron and other shrubs, were some 48 acres of rock formations called the Channels. Originally named "The Great Channels," the rocks jut out of Hayter's Knob—part of what locals call Brumley Mountain. Iridescent in the sun, the rocks are a maze of sandstone some 30 feet high, many pitted with shallow holes or marked by wavy lines. This suggests the rocks may have been under water millions of years ago. But preserve manager Claiborne Woodall said the 400-million-year-old rocks were likely formed by the forces of erosion on a sandstone cap. The Channels forest is also home to the very delicate and rare wildflower *Carolina saxifrage*, which is "very common on cliff faces in this part of the state," he added. Woodall was excited to tell us the 721-acre Channels Natural Area Preserve would become part of the new, 4,836-acre state forest to be named after The Channels. Accordingly, it will be open to hunting" ... the same as (other) state forests," Woodall noted.



Black bears benefit from forest protection.

Citizens Drive Preservation Effort

As far back as March 2002, a proposal had come before the Washington County Board of Supervisors to sub-divide 5,000 acres atop Brumley Mountain into 19 lots for homes. Nearby Poor Valley residents and some prominent individuals strenuously protested this move. One of those who brought the issue to a wider audience's attention was Jack Kestner. Kestner, a retired newspaperman who'd brought his teenage children from Chesapeake back to Hayter's Gap in 1977, where he'd grown up, later wrote about the simple life in the mountains for the *Bristol Herald Courier*.

A stint in the small booth in the firetower as a fire lookout one summer inspired Kestner to write about his experiences in a young adult book, *Firetower*, which came out in 1960. The story inspired Charles Kennedy, who first learned of the property as a student reading the book, to purchase 103 acres adjacent to the Channels in 2000. He then built the Raven's Ridge Campground and Bed and Breakfast, where he and wife Alona provided home-cooked meals and pristine views at 3,700 feet.

Living so close to author Kestner's home, Kennedy met him and they hiked the Channels. Before Kennedy was even aware his land was being considered for takeover and develop-



Colorful mountain laurel and wildflowers adorn the forest understory.



©Dwight Dyke

Big Tumbling Creek, Clinch Mountain Wildlife Management Area

ment, Bill Wasserman, on the southern, Russell County side of the mountain, was trying to preserve Hayter's Knob. Wasserman, a hiker with a 500-acre conservation easement on his own property, let Kennedy know of his struggles to keep the land nearby free of development. For many years the land around Hayter's Knob was owned by the Tommie Upchurch family, who thoroughly logged the area. Wasserman learned that the Department of Forestry had put the firetower up for sale and he put in a successful bid. But Upchurch "wanted to sell the whole area around the firetower [including] the Channels," Wasserman pointed out.

In September 2001, the 4,800-acre Upchurch property was sold to Edwards Wood Products of North Carolina, who wished to ultimately divide the land into lots for a gated subdivision. That idea was presented to the Washington County Board of Su-

pervisors in 2002, after a preliminary public hearing by the county's planning commission. Kennedy, Kestner, and others protested the plans of Edwards Wood Products, and fortunately, the option to divide up the mountain was voted down.

Board member Bobby Ingle later said, "I didn't want to look 25 miles away [from the Abingdon area] and see houses on it... we don't need to develop *everything*." In 2003 the regional Nature Conservancy office looked at the unique area, and purchased the property in 2004 for about \$3.6 million. The behind-the-scenes efforts of The Mountain Heritage Foundation helped make it happen. The MH Foundation, a southwest Virginia community-environmental group, had been working on procuring easements and money to connect Hidden Valley Wildlife Management Area, to the west of Brumley Gap and the Channels, to the Department's Clinch Mountain Wildlife Manage-

ment Area near Laurel Bed Lake to the northeast.

Foundation lawyer and St. Paul conservationist Frank Kilgore approached the Nature Conservancy about the state taking over the 4,800 acres and designating a small portion a natural area preserve. This would bring the foundation closer to creating a trail connecting the different natural areas.

With some lobbying, state funds to purchase the land from the Nature Conservancy were procured through local legislators—including state senators Phillip Puckett, William Wampler Jr., and delegate Joseph Johnson. Regional Nature Conservancy director Brad Kreps appreciated the fact that the legislators championed the idea of a state forest. Connecting three wildlife areas, he said, would create a "conservation corridor" that wildlife in the area could take advantage of.

On May 9, 2008, the Channels State Forest was officially dedicated at the Hayter's Gap Community Center. Tom Smith, who directs the Virginia Natural Heritage Program, said the forest came about because of new partnerships. This included funds from the general assembly, the Virginia Land Conservation Fund, and DCR's Natural Heritage Program.

Although neither Kestner nor Kennedy lived to see the Channels become part of a state forest, Senator Puckett expressed sincere gratitude for their efforts to save the Channels area. □

D. J. Mathews is a freelance writer from St. Paul who writes on outdoor and education topics. She is a Virginia Master Naturalist member.

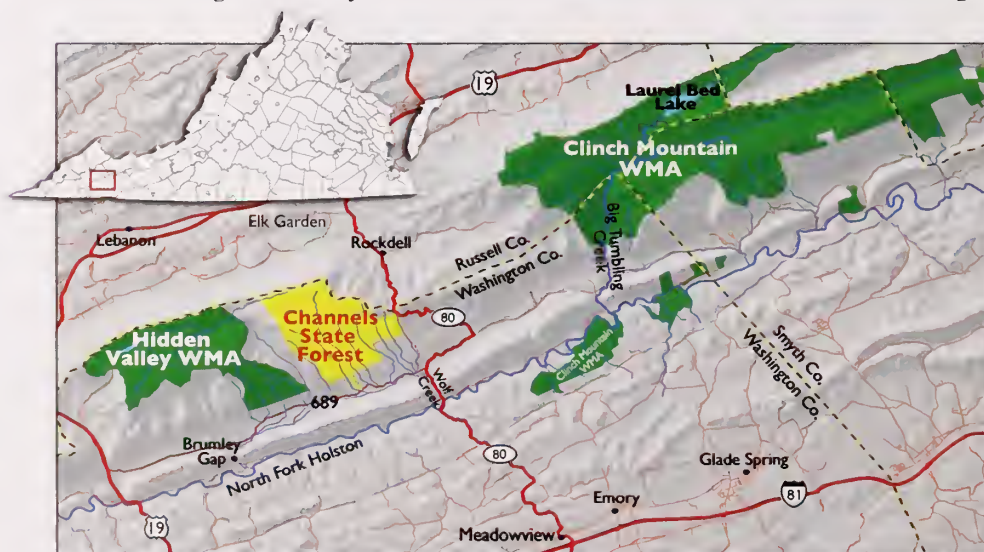
More Information

The Channels State Forest: 4,836 acres; www.dof.virginia.gov.

Where: 15 miles north of Abingdon, Virginia

Activities Permitted: hiking, bird watching, hunting in season

For Directions: Call the regional VA Department of Forestry office at 276-676-5488.





*Red-eyed
Vireo*

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild!



Vireos of Virginia

story and illustrations
by Spike Knuth

The vireos are among the most difficult birds to see and identify with the naked eye. Most of them reside in the upper canopy of large shade trees like oak, hickory, maple, elm, sycamore, and cottonwood. They are difficult to find in thick vegetation, let

alone by field marks. And when looking up into trees, the background of either a bright or an overcast sky renders only a dark silhouette. Most often, their best "field marks" are their songs, all of which are somewhat similar.

The Latin word "vireo" means "I am green," and one of the old names of these birds was "greenlet." They are small, slow-moving, tree-

dwelling birds. Taxonomists once associated them with warblers but according to the Smithsonian field guide, "They are part of an Australasian lineage that is also represented in North America by the shrikes and corvids (crows and jays)." They do have a slightly hooked beak like a shrike, but feeding habits are not the same as the shrike which preys on large insects, small birds, and small mice. Vireos move about in the trees more like tanagers, feeding on caterpillars, other insects, and wild fruits.

Nests represent another distinction of this clan of birds. They build pouch-like nests that hang from the forks of trees. They are constructed of plant fibers, mosses, lichens, spider silk, hair, wasp paper, leaves, and fine grasses. Vireos lay 3 to 5 white or pinkish-white eggs marked to varying degrees with brown. Incubation typically takes 12 to 16 days.

Vireos are generally olive-green to olive-gray above, buffy white or yellowish below, with some bright green or yellow, and some have dark or bluish-green heads. Some have

*Red-eyed
Vireo*





*Yellow-throated
Vireo*

wing bars, or eye rings, or eyebrow stripes. Vireos are stockier and slower moving than warblers.

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*)

This is the most common of our vireos. It is nearly impossible to walk into a summer woodlands without hearing its incessant call which gives rise to one of its nicknames, "preacher bird." Its call has been phonetically described as "hear me-over here-see me-can't you see?" Like most vireos, the red-eyed stay high in the upper canopy, moving about slowly, searching diligently for insects, especially caterpillars.

They are about 6½ inches long, with a dark olive back, darker wings, and tail, with white underparts that are lightly washed with yellow or green. They lack wing bars but show a white line over the eye, a gray cap edged with black, and, of course, the red eye.

Red-eyed vireos generally nest in the fork of a tree or large shrub, building a hanging but shallow, basket-like nest (leading to another of its names, "little hang nest"). The nests are so sturdy that they may last for years and provide homes for mice. In addition to insects, they will feed on wild berries and other plant fruits. They leave Virginia by October and winter from the Gulf coast as far south as Brazil.

Yellow-throated Vireo (*Vireo flavifrons*)

The yellow-throated vireo has a song similar to the red-eyed, but with shorter phrases and longer intervals. It is 6¼ inches long, olive-green above, with yellow throat and breast, greenish sides, white belly, two white

wing bars, a gray rump, and a distinct yellow eye ring.

This bird reaches Virginia in late April and nests in the forks of deciduous trees, usually high up, building a typical pouch-like nest camouflaged with cocoons and lichens and bound together with spider silk. Yellowthroats forage high in the upper canopy of large shade trees, especially oaks, in open woods with dense understory. They feed on insects, insect larvae, and wild fruits at the end of summer.

Migration south occurs in early September; they winter from southern Florida to Mexico, and from Central America to Columbia.

Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*)

The plainest looking of the vireos measures 5½ inches and has olive gray upper parts, whitish underparts, with sides and flanks washed in yellow. They have no wing bars and a faint white line over each eye.



*Warbling
Vireo*



White-eyed
Vireo

Their warbling call is unmistakable; a clear constant, indescribable warble of up to 20 notes, all running together, as often as 4,000 times a day! I remember it as a boy in Wisconsin as the bird I never saw but would hear all summer. I could never get a good look at it because of its habit of foraging through the tops of densely leafed trees up against the sky. It was years later that I finally realized whose song it was.

Warbling vireos nest and live high in tall oaks, elms, maples, cottonwoods, sycamores, and willows, where they feed on insects and caterpillars. The trees may be part of a shady tree-lined road, in open woodlands, along lakeshores or rivers, or in wet bottomlands. The birds suspend their nest from a fork far out on

a drooping limb and build it out of the same basic materials as other vireos, forming a hanging cup.

They have a wide breeding range from all across the northern half of the United States and southern Canada, extending to Virginia. Warbling vireos leave in September to winter in Central America and northern South America.

White-eyed Vireo

(*Vireo griseus*)

The white-eyed is fairly common in Virginia in the thickets and vine tangles of woodland edges, along streams, lakes, and swamps, and in upland thickets of vines and briars. I saw my first white-eyed vireo in a dense hedgerow in the Amelia Wildlife Management Area.

It is grayish-olive above, white below, with pale yellow sides and

flanks. It has white eyes with yellow spectacles, a white chin, dark wings with a pair of white wing bars, and measures about 5½ inches. The song is described phonetically in many ways but my favorite is "pick-up-the-beer-check." Sometimes it utters partial imitations of other birds. Its call is a scolding "tick," and it can get quite upset if you get too close to its nest. Oddly, it is also very inquisitive and will try to sneak up on a person much like a catbird.

The white eye's nest is a more bulky and loosely constructed, cone-shaped, hanging affair, usually built in dense, low-growing shrubs. It too is made up of plant fibers, moss, sticks, lichens, cocoons, wasp paper, and leaves.

White eyes feed on flies, beetles, moth and butterfly larvae, and wild fruits. They winter along the South Atlantic and Gulf coast into Mexico and Central America.

Blue-headed Vireo

(*Vireo solitarius*)

Formerly known as the solitary vireo, the blue-headed vireo nests in the Alleghenies and Appalachians amid the cool, dark reaches of mixed coniferous-deciduous woodlands of pine, hemlock, oaks, hickory, and beech. As its name implies, it has a bluish-gray head with a distinctive white eye ring and white throat, a greenish back, white underparts with yellowish sides, and dark wings with two white wing bars. Its song is typical of vireos and similar to the red-eyed, although higher pitched and clearer, with shorter phrases and pauses.

It builds a pendant nest near the ground in forks of horizontal branches near the center of a small tree constructed of typical vireo building materials. The female blue-headed is said to be fearless, and there are records of the bird allowing itself to be stroked while sitting on its nest. Blue-headed vireo feed at mid-story or high in the canopy on caterpillars and other insects.

Winter is spent along the South Atlantic and Gulf coasts, south to Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

Philadelphia Vireo

(*Vireo philadelphus*)

This vireo does not breed in Virginia but is a common migrant to and from its breeding and wintering grounds. It was first recognized and described near Philadelphia; thus, the name. It is 5 inches long, grayish-olive above, with yellowish or whitish underparts and a grayish crown. There is a faint white stripe over the eye and faint wing bar. Its song is similar to the red-eyed but higher pitched, slower, and more erratic.

This vireo moves north quickly in spring, usually with the last flights of warblers. It breeds in the northern United States and Canada, from Maine and New Brunswick to Alberta. It prefers woodland edges, clearings, and burned over areas, as well as aspen, willow, and alder thickets near streams and lakes.

It builds its nest in the fork of a willow or alder using willow down, birch bark strips, lichens, and grasses.



*Philadelphia
Vireo*

This vireo is a more active feeder than the others, sometimes hanging upside down to get at caterpillars and often launching quickly to capture flying insects.

Philadelphia vireos migrate south in September, back through Virginia to Mexico and Central America. □

Spike Knuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. He is a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.



*Blue-headed
Vireo*

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild! is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists, and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this program visit: bewildvirginia.org.

2009 Outdoor Calendar of Events

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on our Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

July 28: Flat Out Catfish Workshop, James River, Richmond.

July 30, August 1 and 6: Photographing Butterflies and Other Cool Bugs in the Garden; with Lynda Richardson; Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond; www.lewisginter.org.

August 7-9: Virginia Outdoor Sportsman Show, Richmond; www.sportsmanshow.com.

August 14-16: Mother-Daughter Outdoors Weekend, Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox.

August 25: Flat Out Catfish Workshop II, James River, Richmond.

August 29: Ladies' Day Shooting (Handgun or Shotgun) Clinics, Cavalier Rifle & Pistol Club; For reservations call (804) 370-7565 or e-mail H.Baskerville@comcast.net.

September 10, 12 and 17: Photographing Colors, Textures, and Patterns in the Garden; with Lynda Richardson; Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond; www.lewisginter.org.

September 12: Jakes Event; Page Valley Sportsman's Club; contact Art Kasson at (540) 622-6103 or artkasson@yahoo.com.

September 12-13: Western Regional Big Game Contest, www.iwla-rh.org.

September 26: Eastern Shore Birding and Wildlife Festival, Cape Charles.

September 26-27: Eastern Regional Big Game Contest and State Championship, www.vpsa.org. □



Congratulations to all the winners of the youth writing contest, sponsored by the VOWA and recognized at the spring business meeting. Left to right: Lucy Adams, Mark Robinson, Taylor N. Fariss, Scott T. Rollins, and Holly Kays.

Cultivating the Next Generation of Outdoor Writers

Congratulations to this year's winners of the undergraduate and high school writing competitions, awarded by the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association (VOWA).

COLLEGIATE WINNERS

First Place

Lucy Adams, Sophomore Virginia Tech
"Summer of the Rattlesnake"
(printed here)

Second Place

Holly Kays, Sophomore Virginia Tech
"With a Notebook in Hand"

HIGH SCHOOL WINNERS

First Place

Mark Robinson, Senior Patrick Henry High School, Roanoke
"Backpacking"

Second Place

Scott T. Rollins, Senior King George High School, King George
"Monarch of the Pines"

Third Place

Taylor N. Fariss, Senior Lancaster High School, Weems
"The Miracle of Winter" □

Summer of the Rattlesnake

by Lucy Adams

It had been a battle keeping the kids' flashlights off, but we thought it worth the effort. We had wanted them to have the full experience of the woods at night, to be able to see without *being seen* by all the life around them. We had been thinking in terms of the smaller sorts of wildlife—and by the end of the walk, we'd already caught a brightly colored red salamander and several of the familiar northern dusksies.

Now, for the walk back, we were doing our best to fully enforce the no-flashlight rule; perhaps if we were successful we would get the chance to hear a barred owl or another nocturnal bird. That is, if we could enforce silence as well. We were fighting a losing battle on the silence front until it fell all of its own accord at the sound of crackling beside the path.

We quickly pointed our flashlights in the direction of the sound—

and illuminated the long sinuous body of a fully grown timber rattlesnake. The light from our flashlights reflected off his scales, and we could clearly see a lump in the middle of his stomach where he had parked his dinner. There was a correspondingly large lump in my throat as we walked on, after staring for several moments in awe.

It seemed as though moments like that—moments where the inner workings of nature were suddenly and unexpectedly revealed—were common at nature camp. The year I saw the timber rattler was the year I went back to camp to teach, because I'd gotten too old to go back there to learn. I couldn't bear to be parted from a place I loved so much, and I figured I would somehow manage to develop whatever it was my counselors had that kept me coming back as a camper for so many years. Never mind the fact that I have a recurring tendency to avoid all person-to-person interactions (too fraught with the danger of an awkward silence or a social faux pas). I'd deal with that when the time came.

Anyway, what I remember most about my counselors was not their social abilities; it was the look on their faces when they were given the honor of catching a glimpse of the hidden, natural world. I still remember the glowing look on our ornithology teacher's face when she found a hummingbird nest lodged in the fork of a tree at the end of camp. The branch was mottled with lichen, and the nest itself was not much more than a lichen-colored bump with a hole in it large enough to fit my thumb. Maybe. The whole thing was only visible through a tiny gap amidst a profusion of green leaves. I remember filling with excitement as Natalie carefully directed my binoculars in the right direction and the little nest came into focus.

When I went back to camp to teach, I taught freshwater ecology. I taught kids that when you turn over rocks in the stream, you are uncovering a whole world full of alien creatures—the larvae of stoneflies, mayflies and caddisflies—that, if magnified to human proportions,

would become fearsome dragons and deadly wild beasts.

As it is, a mayfly larva will fit in the palm of your hand, and if you fill the palm of your hand with water, its delicate gills will vibrate quickly back and forth to extract all the oxygen from that water supply. I realized it doesn't require any fine-tuned social graces to place a captured mayfly into the hands of an eager child and to watch his face light up with the same excitement I felt when I finally focused on the hummingbird nest.

I'd gone back to camp because I couldn't bear to stay away from it, but in doing so, I found something as rewarding as discovering a hidden nest smaller than my thumb, or hearing the crackling of last fall's leaves beneath the body of a rattlesnake. I discovered the pleasure of listening to the joyful shouts of children who are holding a mayfly for the first time or hearing gasps of wonder from someone who has never seen a snake in the wild before. I figure that if I can instill that sense of wonder in even a few people, my life will have been worth it. □

VOWA Excellence in Craft Award Winners

Bob Gooch Column:

First: King Montgomery with "Tomorrow's Angler" in *An Angler's Journal*, *PressBox Sports Magazine*.

Second: Bill Cochran for "Planting trees is something you do for your grandchildren," the *Roanoke Times*.

Third: King Montgomery with "A Tooth for a Tooth" in *An Angler's Journal*, *PressBox Sports Magazine*.

Feature Article:

First: John Shtogren, "Jarrett Rifles and Cowden Plantation," in *The Virginia Sportsman*.

Second: John Shtogren, "Primland Toms" in *The Virginia Sportsman*.

Third: Bruce Lemmert, "Primum Non Nocere. First, Do No Harm" in *Virginia Wildlife*, December 2008.

Photographs:

First: King Montgomery "Blandfield Plantation" in *The Virginia Sportsman*.

Second: Marie Majarov for *Kingfisher*, cover of *Virginia Wildlife*, March 2008 photography issue.

Third: King Montgomery "Return to the River of Swans: Chilean Patagonia," *The Virginia Sportsman*. □



by Beth Hester

A Natural History of Quiet Waters

by Curtis J. Badger

2007 University of Virginia Press

Phone: 434-982-2932

Hardcover

"A growing number of us are discovering that swamps are an aesthetically pleasing landscape. No other natural system is quite so diverse, with such a wide variety of plants, birds, animals and insects."

—Curtis J. Badger

After coming into a bit of money, Curtis Badger set out to do a little investing. He didn't select a diversified portfolio of mutual funds, or a dull slab of commercial property; what Curtis really wanted was a swamp.

The upshot of this quest to possess "real estate of ill repute" was a three-acre parcel of land on Pungoteague Creek, and a neatly made volume of lyrical explorations into the nature of swamps and other wetlands—those precious, marshy regions of cypress, spartina grass, and black gum. Curtis sets the stage by walking us through a brief political history of our complex relationship with wetlands, including the government's quirky policies of mitigation and 'no net loss.' From there, he takes us on an ecological tour of selected quiet waters along the mid-Atlantic.

Reading the book is a bit like taking a meandering, yet instructive, guided canoe trip, gliding along as Curtis pauses to point out the flora and fauna that make wetland ecosystems work: water lilies, bluegill, prothonotary warblers, snails, damselflies, and Virginia pine.

Of particular interest is the chapter devoted to songbird migration and the crucial role played by the maritime forests, salt marshes, and barrier islands of the mid-Atlantic coastal corridor. Each year, these specialized regions provide seemingly endless ribbons of traveling songbirds with much needed pit stops.

Whether salty or brackish, wetlands provide us with a natural means of erosion control, clean water, and nurseries for fish. For centuries, swamps have gotten a bad rap, but Curtis maintains that in getting to know one, we will begin to appreciate the biological diversity that make wetlands special places indeed. □

Outdoor Kids

Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve Litter Conservation Project

The Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve is located in Russell County. The area consists of 663 protected acres where Cedar Creek winds around, and eventually empties, into the Clinch River. The preserve has several marked trails for hiking, one of which ends at a beautiful natural waterfall called Big Falls. The Pinnacle Natural Preserve gets its name from a towering rock made of limestone and dolomite bedstone. A swinging bridge takes you over Cedar Creek and leads to multiple trails.

The Webelos I Den of Cub Scout Pack 119 performed a community service project within this natural area preserve. On March 17th, seven Scouts and their adult partners picked up trash along the edge of Cedar Creek, which is a stocked trout stream. Along the approximately 1.5-mile stretch of this stream, as well as the trail leading to the Big Falls, these Scouts gathered 38 bags of trash and litter in one evening: everything from cans and glass bottles to tires; they even recovered an old kayak!

The Webelos I Scouts who participated were: Austin Brown, Gabe Hess, Ben Holmes, Levi Horton, Jordan Stout, Branson Sutherland, and Tyler Vencill, as well as den leaders Daniel and Teena Hess and Rodney and Shelley Stout. The Scouts applied the principles of "Leave No Trace" and realized the importance of leaving a place cleaner than they found it. They also realized how litter and carelessly tossing trash can hurt the environment, pollute streams, and harm wildlife.

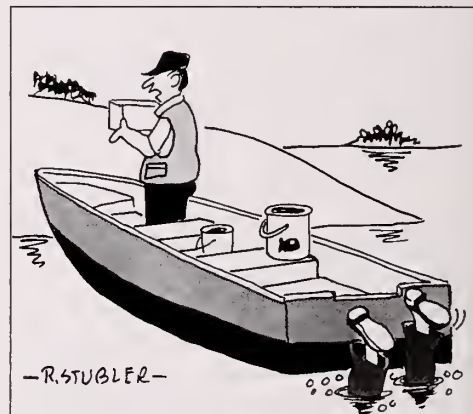
After picking up litter, they also put out "Leave No Trace" birdseed bagels. These were made by spreading a thin layer of peanut butter on top of a bagel and then dipping the bagel in birdseed. No hanger or string was attached to the bagels that could harm the birds or other wildlife we are trying to preserve. The Scouts placed the bagels on tree branches, using the hole in the bagel to hang, for area birds to reach with ease. This project helped them realize the importance of bird and wildlife preservation in their community.

By participating in this and similar service projects, each Scout will earn the Cub Scout *World Conservation Award*. Being community and service-oriented and ecologically-minded can begin even at a young age. These Scouts are well on their way to helping the Earth become a cleaner place.

This report was contributed by Cub Scout Pack 119 of Lebanon, Virginia.



Congratulations to Sarah Lesser (L), shown here with Executive Director Bob Duncan. Sarah was the Overall Individual Female State Champion of the 2009 NASP Tournament. We apologize for the error in our May 2009 issue.



"Need any help putting the outboard motor on, Hank?"

***** SCH 3-DIGIT 229

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Reading Your Label

Is it time to renew? If you are uncertain when your subscription expires, look for the expiration date in the circled location on the sample above.



by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Dining In

Hooking Into Some Blues

Bluefish often get a bad rap. While they generate excitement when battling at the terminal end of your fishing tackle, they rarely elicit the same reaction with the salivary glands of most anglers we know. These fun-to-catch, hard fighting water marauders are frequently viewed as oily, line-slashing pests best suited for rendition into cut bait.

Those who do eat bluefish, often begrudgingly, typically recommend smoking them or using some other means to mitigate the fish's perceived limitations. Yet, among our northeastern coastal states, bluefish are creatively served in some of the finest restaurants.

With a little research and some culinary trial and error, we no longer get the blues when bluefish swarm the baits. We're hooked on bluefish cakes.

So, the next time you're debating what to do with the bluefish you've just brought aboard, save some fillets and try this recipe. Captain Ryan Rogers, skipper of the Mid-night Sun charter fishing boat out of Reedville first suggested this dish to us. He wasn't quite sure how to prepare it; just certain he had heard it wasn't bad.

Bluefish Cakes

- 4 tablespoons chopped onions
- 2 tablespoons chopped green onions
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup cracker crumbs
- $\frac{1}{8}$ cup crab flavored potato chips
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda
- 2 teaspoons Old Bay reduced sodium seasonings
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound cooked bluefish fillets (a little over 1 cup meat)
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon brown mustard
- 5 tablespoons mayonnaise
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons margarine or butter

Fillet the fish early, removing all the dark stuff in the middle of the fillet related to the lateral line. Fillets take on an almost grayish hue, but they will whiten up.

Boil or bake fillets until opaque; then crumble the meat. This is the first step and is similar in preparation to crab cakes.

Heat oil in frying/sauté pan. Cook onions and green onions in oil until soft. Mix with dry ingredients in a bowl (cracker and chip crumbs, parsley, baking soda, seasonings) and add fish, blending gently. Mix next 5 ingredients in a large bowl. Fold fish mixture into wet ingredients and, using your hands, form into cakes. Bring butter to a sizzle in the same pan, add cakes, and reduce heat to medium. Brown on both sides, ensuring the middle of the cake gets hot. The fish cakes can also be frozen and cooked later. We don't recommend adding any salt. Spicy food lovers can add cayenne or red pepper. Serve with a green salad and your favorite honey mustard dressing or over pasta with citrus cream sauce.

Serves two as entrée or four as appetizer. If you serve it over salad, have a crusty bread on the side; if served over pasta, have a side salad. A sauvignon blanc or pinot grigio wine will go well with this, but for something a little different, try a well-chilled Portuguese vinho verde.

Citrus Cream Sauce

This versatile sauce enhances many types of fish, from delicate sea bass to more seasoned fish cakes. A teaspoon of sugar can be added if a sweeter sauce is desired. By changing the ratios of citrus juices and zest, you can make a tangy lime sauce or a sweeter orange sauce. The sauce can be made a day ahead and reheated.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped onions or shallots
- 2 ounces clam juice, fish stock, or vegetable broth
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whipping cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine
- 1 teaspoon orange marmalade
- 1 teaspoon lime juice
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon herbs de province
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon lemon zest

Sauté onions in oil over medium-low heat until soft, about 1 minute. Add all other ingredients and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce heat; use a wire whisk to thoroughly blend, and cook until reduced to desired consistency, about 12 minutes. □

On The Water

by Tom Guess

There's a Storm A-brewin'

I tossed and turned with excitement as the night-time hours ticked away, finally seeing the light in the hallway shining on the hardwood floor beneath the bedroom door. It wasn't long until I heard my grandfather's footsteps heading toward the kitchen. I could hear the coffee percolating, followed by the smell and sound of bacon sizzling in his favorite cast iron skillet—music to a boy's ears. Soon he would open the door and say, "Hey boy ... you gonna sleep all day?"

Even as I wearily rolled out of bed, I was brimming with excitement to go! I always looked forward to his strong coffee, half burned bacon, and crispy fried eggs.

It was July 1978, and we were going fishing on my grandfather's best friend's boat in the Chesapeake Bay out of Hampton.

I recall getting underway and heading out from Buckroe Beach. The water was calm, but there was a decent groundswell coming from the

east. Soon I found that the breakfast I was so fond of became less pleasant with each passing swell.

I did what any greenhorn would do: I pointed my face to the wind, breathed deeply, tried to suck it up ... and got sick! I recall my grandfather being concerned for my well-being but laughing at the same time. Although I didn't find my saltwater rite of passage to be quite as hilarious as others in the boat, it was the first of many learning experiences that day.

Seasickness affects even the most experienced boater and can cause a fun-filled day to turn miserable. I'm not too proud to admit that even though I spent a career in the Coast Guard, I occasionally took seasick medication when it was rough. There are many over-the-counter and homeopathic remedies available that will provide relief, but you should first discuss your options with a pharmacist or doctor.

After catching some flounder and then driving the boat for a bit, I started to feel a little better. That's when I noticed a more pronounced chill in the air and dark, angry clouds building in the sky. My grandfather, being from the Shenandoah Valley, often had a unique way of putting things. He said, "There is a storm a-brewin' and we're-a-gonna get wet directly." We started heading for cover under the Bay Bridge-Tunnel when the heavens let loose and the bottom fell out. I had never experienced the wrath of the sea or witnessed lightning and thunder like that in my young life. I gained a new respect for nature that day. The storm didn't last long, but it definitely took my mind off my seasickness.



©Dwight Dyke

When skies threaten, return to dry land or seek safe harbor.

During impending weather threats, the best course of action is to return to dry land and get off your boat. If that is not possible, have everyone onboard don a lifejacket, secure all gear, and seek safe harbor. If you hear the Coast Guard broadcasting urgent marine messages on VHF-FM channel 16 and 22a, listen closely and take immediate action.

We fared well that day, but thunderstorms can be deadly on the water if you don't take appropriate action. It was, without a doubt, one of my most memorable trips "on the water." It also was my initiation to a lifelong love of boating, hunting, and fishing. "Thanks, Opa!" □

Tom Guess, U. S. Coast Guard (Ret), serves as a statewide coordinator for the Boating Safety Education Program at DGIF.



Stanley "Opa" Guess was my mentor to becoming a sportsman.

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Don't Be Afraid to Flash Outdoors

Any photographer who has ever photographed in the great outdoors has run into the problem of having to shoot in bad light. Bright noon-day sun beats down on your subjects, creating harsh shadows which can ruin a nice shot.

One solution to this challenge is to use flash for some outdoor shots. It might seem weird to think about using a flash outdoors, but many photographers use this technique with incredible results. You can use the camera's pop-up flash on close subjects, but it is the removable on-camera flashes that give you the most versatility and power.

I have taught hundreds of photography workshops and one thing I've discovered: Most people are afraid of their flashes. Yes, the instruction booklets are intimidating and hard to understand, but I think the biggest problem is that people don't practice enough. Don't wait until your son or daughter's wedding day to learn to use your flash! Do it now before an important event or situation arises. This is the digital age, the age of instant gratification. If you take a picture with your flash and it doesn't look right, make an adjustment and re-shoot!

A flash offers two different shooting options: M (manual) and E TTL (evaluative through-the-lens). A manual flash setting allows you to choose whichever aperture and shutter speed you want for the camera, as well as the amount of time the flash fires. Adjustments to your flash output can then be modified with the exposure compensation feature—either with the flash itself or the camera. Just be sure not to confuse this for the camera's exposure compensation feature. (When in doubt, check your flash and camera manuals.)

E TTL can be thought of as the 'automatic' setting for your flash. When you set your flash to ETTL, the camera and flash automatically work



Using a flash on this backlit spider really made it pop out of the strongly lit background. Canon 5D digital camera, Canon 180mm macro lens, ISO 100, 1/20th on tripod, f16.0, flash fired.
©Lynda Richardson

together to adjust flash output based on exposure information gathered through the camera lens. You can still adjust your flash output in the ways mentioned previously.

If you want to learn to use your flash outdoors, I would recommend selecting either the Manual or the E TTL feature (which seems to be most popular) and practice learning to use that feature first. Use your selected flash feature with different camera

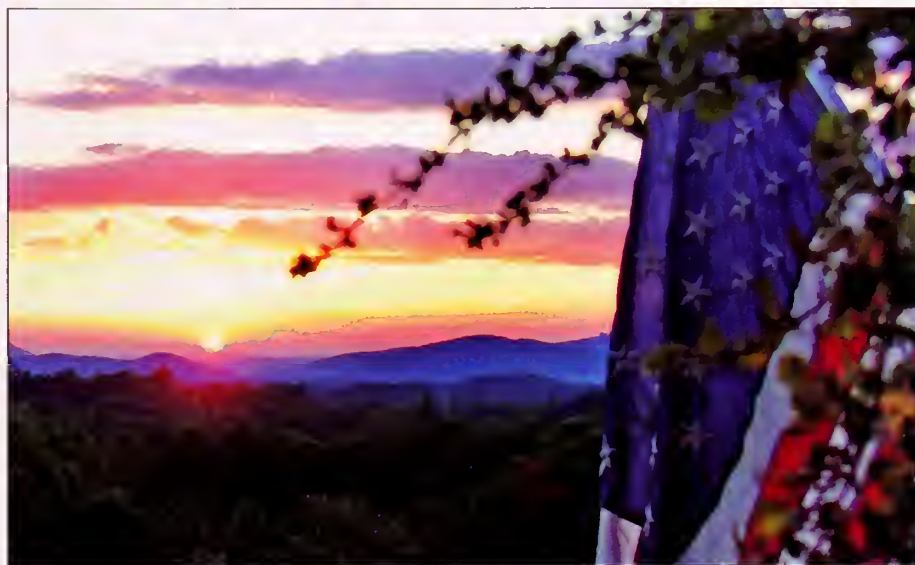
settings and lenses. See how it handles getting close or moving far away from your subject. What does the flash exposure compensation feature on the flash or the camera do for your photographs?

Don't have an agenda for images you have to capture? Just go out and have fun experimenting.

Don't let your fear of 'flashing' take away the opportunity to create better images and become an even more skilled photographer. Your flash is an incredible tool, so don't be afraid to give it a workout. Good luck! □

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," Virginia Wildlife Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send original slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res jpeg, tiff, or raw files on a disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with our readers.

Image of the Month



Congratulations to Dan and Harriet Madar for this beautiful and seasonally appropriate scenic, titled "Day is Done," taken from their front porch in Goodview. (No kidding!) Fuji Finepix S5000 digital camera, ISO 200, 1/270th, f2.8.

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Be Responsible Be Safe Have Fun

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Boating Safety Courses Are Required**

Personal Watercraft (PWC) "Jet Ski"

Age 20 or younger, July 1, 2009

Age 35 or younger, July 1, 2010

Age 50 or younger, July 1, 2011

All ages by July 1, 2012

Motorboat 10 hp or Greater

Age 20 or younger, July 1, 2011

Age 30 or younger, July 1, 2012

Age 40 or younger, July 1, 2013

Age 45 or younger, July 1, 2014

Age 50 or younger, July 1, 2015

All ages by July 1, 2016

